

**STATEMENT OF DAVID P. DOSS
STATE CONSERVATIONIST, NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION
SERVICE,
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BEFORE THE
HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE, AND
OCEANS
June 14, 2004**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to discuss conservation activities in the Delmarva Peninsula. The natural resources associated with the Chesapeake Bay, and particularly the Delmarva Peninsula, are a top priority for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The NRCS recognizes the unique characteristics and important attributes of this land and its people. The peninsula on which this hearing takes place this morning contains about 1.7 million acres of farmland, characterized by sandy soils and flat topography. The integration of intense agriculture, forestry and community development pressures significantly impact the use of natural resources, environmental quality, and the overall economic viability of the region. The NRCS has many ongoing activities to assist farmers and private landowners in this region. I would like to highlight just a few of the key activities that we have underway:

2002 Farm Bill

Two years ago, we witnessed enactment of one of the most important pieces of conservation policy in the 2002 Farm Bill. The legislation responds

to a broad range of emerging conservation challenges faced by farmers and ranchers, including soil erosion, water quality, wetlands conservation, wildlife habitat improvement, and farm and ranchland protection. Private landowners will benefit from a portfolio of voluntary assistance, including cost-share, land rental, incentive payments, and technical assistance. The Farm Bill places a strong emphasis on the conservation of working lands – ensuring that lands remain both healthy and productive.

The Farm Bill provided an increase of more than \$17 billion in investment in conservation program funding for a range of programs. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides technical and financial assistance, often in the form of cost-share payments to producers to address environmental concerns on the farm. EQIP addresses diverse natural resource issues, including erosion, sedimentation, and nutrient loading. The program also focuses on improving the productivity of farms and working lands in active production. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) provides assistance to promote the development and maintenance of habitat for a broad range of species. The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) restores and protects wetlands with cost share payments and easements of varying lengths. Also, the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) matches resources with government and non-governmental efforts to protect prime and unique farmland from conversion to non-agricultural uses. For each of these initiatives, and many additional programs included in the Farm Bill Conservation Title, water quality benefits result from our work either directly or indirectly.

For FY 2004, funding for the three states comprising the Delmarva Peninsula is as follows:

	Maryland	Delaware	Virginia
EQIP	\$6,701,100	\$5,366,500	\$12,366,100
WRP	\$1,320,000	\$370,000	\$2,110,000
WHIP	\$450,000	\$430,000	\$718,000
FRPP	\$6,093,800	\$4,212,200	\$1,421,900

Special Emphasis Funding for the Delmarva Peninsula

On March 17, 2004, Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced the targeting of \$5 million in conservation program funding to Maryland, Delaware and Virginia to help improve natural resources in the Delmarva Peninsula. USDA is using the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) to provide additional financial and technical assistance to landowners in the Delmarva. As part of this effort, Maryland received nearly \$2.9 million in additional funding in these three programs for nine Eastern Shore counties; Delaware, \$1.7 million for three counties, and Virginia, \$435,200 for two

counties. I would note that of particular importance, NRCS has partnered with the State of Maryland on planting cover crops on the land, to assist with multiple natural resource issues.

Chesapeake Bay Assistance

The Chesapeake Bay Program is a unique regional partnership that has been directing and conducting the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay since the signing of the historic Chesapeake Bay Agreement of 1983. The Bay Program partners include the States of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, the District of Columbia, and the Chesapeake Bay Commission. In 2002 the partnership welcomed Delaware, New York, and West Virginia as “headwater partners” to better coordinate efforts in all parts of the watershed.

As the largest estuary in the United States, and one of the most productive in the world, the Chesapeake Bay was the nation’s first estuary targeted for restoration and protection. Scientific and estuarine research on the Bay in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s pinpointed three areas requiring immediate attention, nutrient over-enrichment, dwindling underwater bay grasses, and toxic pollution. Once the initial research was completed, the Bay Program evolved as the means to restore this exceptionally valuable resource.

NRCS has been an active Federal agency partner since the late 1970’s. Technical staff worked closely with researchers in determining why the living resources in the watershed were declining. Shortly after the signing of the Chesapeake Bay Agreement in 1983,

earmark legislation was passed, directing NRCS to increase technical staffing throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. This earmark legislation has continued to the present time. This year, NRCS is providing \$6,000,000 to support this initiative over and above standard allocations.

Technical assistance being provided to private landowners continues to be an important issue as the Chesapeake Bay Program promotes implementation of conservation practices. In cooperation with local conservation districts, NRCS technical staff provides the primary interface between private landowners and numerous state and Federal programs. NRCS is the only agency among the Chesapeake Bay Program partners that has technical field staff distributed throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed prepared to meet the needs of these programs.

Summary

Mr. Chairman, we know that the 2002 Farm Bill Conservation Programs are making important contributions to natural resource improvements on the Delmarva Peninsula. I know that we are making significant progress in this area, and look forward to continuing to improve our work in this area. I thank Members of the Subcommittee again for the opportunity to appear here today, and would be pleased to respond to any questions that Members of the Subcommittee might have.